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ZNY SSSS ZZH
O 211143Z MAR 08
FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2367
INFO RUEHZS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 5715
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 8482
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 4387
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 0519
RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON 2239
RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 4970
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
RHEFAAA/DIA DAH WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI

S E C R E T BANGKOK 000909

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DEPT FOR EAP/MLS
NSC FOR PHU

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/20/2028

TAGS: PGOV PHUM PINR PREL PTER TH

SUBJECT: SOUTHERN VIOLENCE: SAMAK MISSPEAKS, PEACE PROCESS
TAKES A HIT

REF: A. CHIANG MAI 00040 (PEACE DIALOGUE AWAITS SIGNAL)
1B. BANGKOK 300 (DAS MARCIEL HEARS VIEWS ON SOUTHERN
VIOLENCE)
1C. BANGKOK 6281 (SOUTHERN DIALOGUE FACILITATOR
GIVES OPTIMISTIC READOUT)
1D. BANGKOK 06161 (SURAYUD TALKS TO THE BRN-C)
1E. BANGKOK 03846 (UPDATE ON JUNE PEACE TALKS)
1F. BANGKOK 00938 (DIALOGUE MOVES FORWARD)
1G. BANGKOK 04083 (FIRST RTG MEETING WITH PULO)

Classified By: DCM James F. Entwistle: 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (S/NF) Summary: Prime Minister Samak blew the cover of the government's secret talks with the insurgents in comments to the press on March 19. An Embassy contact reports that the statement criticizing the talks was due to the Prime Minister's misunderstanding of a briefing paper, and does not represent a change in the government's policy to continue the talks mediated by a respected NGO. Nevertheless, this public criticism could cast a pall on the negotiation process. Given the increased tension in southern Thailand in the wake of the March 15 bombings, it is bad time to stop talking. End summary.

12. (S/NF) On March 19, the nascent southern Thailand peace process brokered by the Henri Dunant Center for Humanitarian Dialogue (HDC) may have suffered a set-back when Prime Minister Samak acknowledged to the Thai press that southern militant groups were conducting negotiations in Geneva, Switzerland. According to the press reports, Samak said at least two militant groups were conducting negotiations in Geneva in an attempt to bring international attention to the southern conflict. He said the government does not recognize the negotiations. In an effort to clarify whether this statement was intended to signal that Samak was pulling the government out of the "secret" negotiations, Poloff met with an Embassy contact who claims wide-ranging connections in and out of the current administration.

13. (S/NF) According to the contact, Samak was simply confused about the issue, and misspoke. The contact said Samak, prior to a cabinet meeting to discuss the insurgency, was given a detailed briefing paper on the peace process. The paper laid

out the history of the conflict and the peace negotiations brokered by HDC. The contact believes Samak had either misread the paper, or misunderstood it. The contact said the government's policy regarding negotiations is clear, and there is no intention of changing it. The policy is to make use of available opportunities to talk to the militants, but avoid internationalizing the issue at all costs. He said Samak's comments had played into the hands of hard-liners in the government/military, who don't believe it is possible to negotiate, and had greatly upset militant leaders.

¶4. (S/NF) Comment: Samak at the microphone is always a dicey proposition. We are not sure what effect this statement will have on the peace negotiations, and are still not clear about his intentions. Although our contact claimed familiarity with the contents of the briefing paper, he based his remarks about Samak's confusion on second-hand sources close to the Prime Minister. It is possible that Samak was confused about the issue, but also possible that he was honestly expressing a personal preference against negotiations. In any event, the secret process is not a secret anymore, and this may complicate efforts to continue these meetings. HDC had placed a high premium on keeping the talks secret, presumably to prevent them being crushed under the weight of outraged opposition from Thai officials who still favor a military-security approach to the southern unrest. Given the increased tensions in the south in the wake of the March 15 bombings, it is a bad time to stop talking. We hope to hear directly from HDC soon to get a better assessment of the impact of the PM's statements on the peace process. Moreover, we will encourage Samak and those around him to continue to talk with the militants.

JOHN